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Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Tuesday, 11 April 2000, at 3 p.m.

Chairperson: Mr. SIMKHADA (Nepal)

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GE.00-12658 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

STATEMENT BY MRS. OGATA, UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES

1. Mrs. OGATA (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) said that, as ever-increasing numbers of people were fleeing from war, violence and persecution, the need for the Commission on Human Rights to address the underlying causes of mass exodus and displacement of individuals was greater than ever.

2. The reports of the various experts of the Commission had highlighted the appalling violations of human rights and humanitarian law occurring in almost every region of the world and which had forced hundreds of thousands of people to seek asylum in neighbouring countries and had displaced millions of others within their own countries.

3. The internal conflicts which were giving rise to those humanitarian crises were often related to deep divisions between ethnic communities, compounded by struggles for the control of natural and economic resources. This was particularly apparent in Central Africa, where every country without exception had experienced or was still experiencing humanitarian crises. Currently the cases of Angola, Burundi and the Democratic Republic of the Congo could be mentioned. But the problem was not specific to Africa. In the Balkans, and particularly in Kosovo, relations between the different ethnic communities were marked by hate and violence.

4. The situations of refugees and those of internally displaced persons were similar everywhere. The causes and consequences of displacements, and the humanitarian needs of the populations affected, were identical. It was therefore not surprising that the HCR's activities on behalf of the internally displaced should have increased dramatically. The HCR was currently providing protection and assistance not only to 17 million refugees and returnees but also to 5 million internally displaced people. However, it knew from experience that it was sometimes more difficult to deal with internally displaced people than with refugees who crossed borders; civilians fleeing within a country tended to make for isolated, dangerous and relatively inaccessible areas, and the authorities, which often had a substantial measure of responsibility for the situation of the persons concerned, tended to complicate the task of the assisting agency.

5. The North Caucasus illustrated the problems hampering the provision of assistance and protection to displaced persons. The HCR had established a presence there in 1995, but had withdrawn from the region following the kidnapping of the head of the HCR office in Vladikavkaz in 1998. In 1999, following the resumption of hostilities, HCR, at the request of the Republics of Daghestan and Ingushetia, had again intervened to provide emergency relief to over 200,000 Chechen refugees in the two republics.

6. The HCR was one of the few organizations operating in the North Caucasus. But its work was hampered by a lack of security. The staff were in fact based, not in Chechnya, but in the neighbouring republics. Humanitarian assistance was considerably weakened by that situation. However, HCR had been able to identify the problems and was seeking, together with the authorities, to overcome them.

7. The excessive use of force against civilians had always been a primary concern of the United Nations. For that reason the Secretary-General had in September last appointed Mrs. Ogata his special envoy to the Russian Federation to examine the humanitarian consequences of the conflict. Mrs. Ogata and her colleagues had been able to organize the passage of humanitarian convoys into the North Caucasus region, including Grozny. She had appealed to the then Prime Minister, Mr. Putin, to spare the lives and respect the rights of civilians; she had also asked for the frontiers to remain open so that persons threatened could find safe havens outside the areas of conflict.

8. One of the main objectives of the HCR had always been to find safe and permanent solutions to the situations of displaced persons and to ensure that no one was forced to return to Chechnya. To that end it had strengthened its protective presence on the ground insofar as its staff members were not endangered thereby. That presence would be particularly important inasmuch as the numbers of persons wishing to return to Chechnya were increasing. However, as with all population displacements, it was the responsibility of the national authorities to provide aid and protection to returnees. If confidence were to be restored the reports on the presumed violations of human rights and humanitarian law committed by the Russian Federation had to be handled with the utmost transparency.

9. The problem of internal displacement illustrated the distinct but nonetheless complementary mandates of humanitarian agencies and mechanisms for the defence of human rights. Each year the HCR monitored the implementation of legal standards, insisting, naturally, on the fundamental nature of the right of asylum, which was the cornerstone of refugee protection. However, being a humanitarian organization, it approached that task not so much through advocacy as by being present side by side with the persons it was defending - in other words, through its "protection operations". The protection of refugees and the improvement of their lot involved ensuring that their material needs were met, providing counselling and alleviating their traumas, helping them to become self-sufficient and ensuring that the communities hosting them did not develop hostility towards them. Special attention had to be paid to the most vulnerable - women, children and the elderly.

10. Human rights organizations, and particularly the mechanisms set up by the Commission on Human Rights, were playing an extremely important role which complemented that of the HCR. Those bodies drew the attention of international public opinion to the human rights violations which caused refugee outflows, thus encouraging the adoption of corrective measures. They were also concerned with legal questions - compensation for victims and the prosecution and punishment of the presumed perpetrators of crimes. With that complementarity in mind, the HCR intended to continue to cooperate with the Commission on Human Rights, the High Commissioner for Human Rights and with the representative of the Secretary-General on Internally Displaced Persons, in particular by exchanging views and pooling information in order to find lasting solutions and averting further crises.

11. Restoring judicial systems, or establishing new ones, and the prosecution of perpetrators of crimes against humanity were of course extremely important tasks. But it was necessary to go further and encourage divided populations to learn to "coexist". The first stage had to be one of "coexistence" rather than "reconciliation", because after such tragedies the former objective was less ambitious and more realistic. Eventually coexistence could lead to reconciliation - the

common aim of humanitarian agencies and human rights mechanisms. The HCR was endeavouring to promote coexistence by creating community projects involving the participation of different ethnic groups (as in Bosnia) and encouraging women to take up activities which would build bridges between communities (as in Rwanda, Bosnia, Kosovo and Afghanistan).

12. She urged that many more efforts of this kind be made before the situation deteriorated to the point where the only possible outcome would be conflict and displacement of populations. In that context she fully supported the High Commissioner for Human Rights, who at the beginning of the current session had stressed the need to direct the efforts of the international community more towards conflict prevention. Within that comprehensive strategy all the actors concerned - in the humanitarian field, in that of human rights and in the economic and political sectors - could make a contribution to the whole.

REPORT OF THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS AND FOLLOW-UP TO THE WORLD CONFERENCE ON HUMAN RIGHTS (agenda item 4) (Question of Chechnya)

13. Mr. KALAMANOV (Russian Federation), speaking as Special Representative of the President of the Russian Federation on matters concerning the protection of human rights in Chechnya, explained that one of his principal functions was that of cooperation with intergovernmental and non-governmental international organizations with the aim of protecting human rights in that Republic.

14. On 5 April last Mrs. Mary Robinson, High Commissioner for Human Rights, had reported on her visit to the North Caucasus. In that connection, the Russian Federation had given proof of its willingness to enter into dialogue. Unfortunately, when the High Commissioner described her mandate, she failed to mention certain essential provisions of United Nations General Assembly resolution 48/141, such as respect for territorial integrity and national jurisdiction and impartiality and objectivity.

15. Federal States had an obligation to defend human rights throughout the whole of their territory. For many years, trafficking in slaves, extrajudicial executions, torture and enforced displacements had been taking place in the Chechen Republic. The extension of those activities to the neighbouring republics had compelled the Russian Government to intervene to restore order and put an end to terrorism and hostage-taking.

16. In 1995 and 1996 the Commission on Human Rights, in the statements made by its chairpersons at the time, had referred to the need to continue consultations with the Government of the Russian Federation, in particular to promote measures which would restore confidence in respect of human rights. Subsequently, however, the High Commissioner had lost all interest in the situation in Chechyna. At that time, however, some 500,000 persons had been expelled from Chechnya, and other serious violations of human rights had occurred there. Nevertheless, the High Commissioner and the entire human rights community had remained silent.

17. The kidnapping of the regional representative of HCR in the Northern Caucasus had given rise to some agitation, but nobody had paid any attention to the hostage-taking or the terrorist acts which had caused the deaths of hundreds of innocent people. Concern did not

develop at the international level until after the anti-terrorist operation had been launched. What interest was it sought to serve by expressing those concerns? "Numerous allegations of serious violations of human rights" appeared to have compelled the High Commissioner to make a public statement. That statement, and other expressions of concern, coincided with the broadcasting of a film on alleged mass executions of civilians in Chechnya on a German television channel. When that channel admitted that the film was a forgery, the senior officials responsible for human rights made no comments.

18. As regards the "first-hand" information which, according to the High Commissioner, demonstrated that serious violations of human rights had been committed by the federal forces, there were legitimate grounds for querying the plausibility of the examples quoted. In particular, it was to be wondered how a woman who had allegedly received several bullet wounds and been burnt by Russian soldiers had been able to survive, and even to give a full account to the High Commissioner. Curiously enough, the report entitled Killings of civilians in the Staropromyslovsky district of Grozny, published by Human Rights Watch, contained an identical story. Everything had been done to respond to the wishes of the High Commissioner during her stay in Russia, but "it had been impossible to show her the filtration camps" for the very good reason that there were none. The situation in the region was extremely difficult. He therefore requested the High Commissioner and the members of the Commission not to draw hasty conclusions and not to give credence to mendacious rumours and allegations. The activities of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in member States had to comply with national legislation. It was high time to begin a serious discussion on the working methods of the High Commissioner when dealing with what were referred to as "urgent situations".

19. The Russian Federation would continue to pursue its policies in Chechnya, namely the eradication of international terrorism, the search for a lasting political solution, the restoration of legality, the protection of human rights and the restoration of economic and social life in that country. All assistance in the pursuit of those ends would be welcome.

20. Mr. MENDONCA E MOURA (Portugal), speaking on behalf of the European Union, said that the latter supported the conclusions of the report of the High Commissioner on her visit to Chechnya. The European Union was particularly concerned by allegations of large-scale violations of human rights, including mass killings, extrajudicial, summary and arbitrary executions, violence against women, torture, arbitrary detention and pillage. The fact that certain criminal prosecutions had been initiated was encouraging; but the Union considered that a different level of response was needed.

21. The European Union called upon the Government of the Russian Federation urgently to establish a national, broad-based and independent commission of inquiry to establish the truth and identify the persons responsible, with a view to bringing them to justice. It also called on the Russian authorities to abide by their commitments, and particularly those accepted within the framework of the Council of Europe and the OSCE. It was looking forward to the visit to the region which the current President of the OSCE was to make on 14 and 15 April to prepare for resumption of the activities of the Assistance Group in Chechnya. It strongly urged the Russian authorities to put an end to the disproportionate use of force, and particularly to attacks on civilians.

22. The European Union was also deeply concerned by the attacks against civilians and the crimes committed by the Chechen fighters. It deplored the suffering inflicted on the civilian population by all the parties to the conflict and urged them to take immediate steps to bring an end to hostilities and to begin negotiations with the aim of arriving at a peaceful solution which would fully respect the territorial integrity and the Constitution of the Russian Federation.

23. The European Union called on the Russian authorities to allow all the competent international agencies and observers to perform their missions freely and in complete safety. It also encouraged them to enter into an open and constructive dialogue with the international community on the subject of violations of human rights and international humanitarian law in Chechnya. In that connection it welcomed the preliminary agreement concluded between the Russian authorities and the International Committee of the Red Cross authorizing the latter to enter Russian detention camps freely and in complete safety.

24. The European Union also welcomed the invitation extended by the Russian Government to the High Commissioner to make a return visit in two or three months' time. It stressed the importance of effective cooperation with the mechanisms of the Commission on Human Rights and urged the Russian authorities to accept the requests already made to it or which might be made to it in that field.

25. The European Union would continue closely to follow the situation in Chechnya. It thus attached importance to a future report by the High Commissioner and the reports prepared by the special mechanisms. It remained convinced that the Commission on Human Rights had a vital role to play.

26. Mr. SOMOL (Czech Republic) stated that his country had already condemned on several occasions the violations of human rights committed in Chechnya. However, his country noted with approval the measures taken by the Russian Federation, and in particular the establishment of the office of the Special Representative of the President for Human Rights.

27. The Czech Republic was in favour of coordinated action by the international community under the leadership of the United Nations, the Council of Europe or the OSCE. In that context it approved the measures taken by the Council of Europe and welcomed the mission recently undertaken in Chechnya by its High Commissioner, Mr. Gil-Robles. It considered that the decision of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe to suspend the voting rights of the Russian Federation was an appropriate one in view of the seriousness of the situation in Chechnya.

28. The Czech Republic was glad that the High Commissioner for Human Rights had succeeded in visiting the North Caucasus a few days earlier. It was alarmed by the large-scale violations of human rights of which she had been informed. It regretted that the High Commissioner had been unable to visit some extremely important places or to talk with representatives of certain NGOs, and also that she had been unable to meet the President of the Russian Federation. Although firmness was a necessity in such situations, the Russian authorities should not interpret that as interference, but rather as an encouragement to seek a solution.

29. The Czech Republic fully identified itself with the conclusions reached by the High Commissioner following her mission. It was in favour of an in-depth investigation of violations committed and considered that those responsible for atrocities should be brought to justice, irrespective of the side they were on. It unreservedly supported the idea of setting up an independent commission of inquiry with technical support from the Office of the High Commissioner. The United Nations mechanisms responsible for the protection of human rights should be fully involved in the process.

30. In the humanitarian field it was essential that both international and national organizations should be able to operate not only in Chechen territory but also in the neighbouring republics, and in particular in Ingushetia. The Czech Republic welcomed the authorization to enter Chechnya extended by the Russian authorities to the International Committee of the Red Cross and hoped that other bodies would also operate in the region. His country was ready to come to the aid of victims and had begun to do so by organizing the first foreign humanitarian aid convoy to reach Grozny in the previous month.

31. Ms. RUBIN (United States of America) said that the United States Government had welcomed Mrs. Robinson's visit to Russia and strongly supported her approach. It shared her serious concerns about the situation in Chechnya and the violations of human rights and humanitarian law committed both by the Russian army and by the Chechen forces.

32. The United States Government recognized Russia's right to defend its territorial integrity and to protect its population against terrorist acts and attacks from insurgent groups. However, it condemned the methods resorted to, considering that security consideration in no way justified the massive use of force against civilians. The atrocities committed in Chechnya were hindering the process of democratization in Russia and were damaging its reputation in the eyes of the world. Grozny was now in ruins, and its reconstruction, like that of Chechnya as a whole, would require an enormous amount of time and money.

33. The decision of the Russian Government to accept the visit of the High Commissioner for Human Rights was worthy of praise. On the other hand, it was regrettable that the Russian authorities had not given her access to all the sites she wished to visit. That stood in contrast with the positive measures taken just before her arrival, when President Putin had agreed to facilitate the return of the International Committee of the Red Cross and the OSCE Assistance Group to Chechnya and to include experts from the Council of Europe in the team of the Special Representative for Human Rights in Chechnya.

34. Russia had begun to take certain steps in response to the concerns of the Commission, but the United States Government shared the concern of the High Commissioner in her report where she questioned whether the steps taken were commensurate with the violations of human rights described. The war in Chechnya had already seriously damaged Russia's international standing. The Russian authorities could either endeavour to repair that damage or choose to isolate the country still further.

35. Measures must be taken to establish the truth and to call those responsible to account. As the High Commissioner had pointed out in her report, the Special Rapporteurs and the Special Representatives could play an important role in informing and advising the Commission.

Cooperation with the Commission's mechanisms was thus essential. However, a knowledge of the situation was not sufficient to bring the perpetrators of violations of human rights and international humanitarian law to account for their actions. To achieve that end, Russia must immediately undertake, in cooperation with international bodies and experts, a transparent, impartial and independent investigation of all the charges, particularly those associated with Alkhan-Yurt, Staropromyslovsky and Aldi. The appointment of a Special Representative of the President for Human Rights in Chechnya was a first step, but his mandate must be clearly defined.

36. The United States Government would support the establishment in Russia of an independent national commission of inquiry with international participation. Unless the Russian Government moved swiftly to take the necessary measures, it would have difficulty in regaining the trust of the international community.

37. Mr. HYMES (Canada) expressed his country's deep concern about the humanitarian crisis in Chechnya and the alleged abuses committed by the parties to the conflict. Canada was pleased that the High Commissioner had been able to visit the region and hear the testimony of the victims.

38. It was the responsibility of the Russian authorities to take effective measures to end the human rights abuses in Chechnya, which could not be justified by any security considerations. They should also punish past violations, and particularly the murder of the Canadian nurse Nancy Malloy and her five ICRC colleagues in December 1996.

39. Canada considered the appointment by Russia by a Special Representative for human rights in Chechnya, its agreement to cooperate with the NGOs in investigating human rights violations and the opening of its own investigation into some of the crimes alleged to have been committed by its military personnel in Chechnya to be encouraging signs. Only an open and comprehensive investigation would permit progress towards a peaceful solution.

40. The international community had a crucial role to play in ensuring the credibility of the process in the eyes not only of international observers but also of Russian citizens in Chechnya. Canada emphasized the importance of international experts in any commission of inquiry which might be set up and consequently welcomed the willingness to admit international observers into the region shown by the Russian authorities. He also hoped that the High Commissioner would be able to return to the region in a few months' time, as the Russian authorities had invited her to do. It would also be desirable for the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for internally displaced persons and the Special Rapporteur on extra-judicial, summary or arbitrary executions should be able to undertake missions to the region as recommended by the High Commissioner.

41. Mrs. Robinson had fully discharged her mandate by going to Chechnya with all dispatch and submitting a report containing recommendations, including a recommendation for the establishment of an independent commission of inquiry with international participation. The Commission and its members now had the task of living up to their responsibility.

42. Mr. AKRAM (Pakistan), speaking on behalf of the member States of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, stated that the members of the OIC had listened attentively to Mrs. Robinson's report on her visit to Chechnya and hoped that that visit would be followed by a return visit to the region. In that connection they had taken note of the invitation extended to Mrs. Robinson by the Russian authorities.

43. The member States of the OIC endorsed the recommendations of the High Commissioner, namely that the Government of the Russian Federation should abstain from using heavy weaponry in densely populated areas and that any resolution of the conflict should include provisions for the rebuilding of the country's infrastructures, the restoration of economic life and a return to long-term stability. Like Mrs. Robinson, they requested authorization for humanitarian aid organizations to conduct operations in Chechnya freely and in safety. The Russian Federation should establish a broadly representative and independent national commission of inquiry to look into the serious violations of human rights committed in the region. The United Nations mechanisms for the protection of human rights should be able to operate in Chechnya with the full cooperation of the Russian authorities.

44. The OIC member countries, while respecting the principle of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Russian Federation, called for the adoption of the following concrete measures: the cessation of military operations, the release of prisoners and hostages, the safe return of refugees and displaced persons, the declaration of a general amnesty, the commencement of dialogue with the Chechen representatives, the separation of powers between local and federal authorities in accordance with the 1996 Accord, a granting of guarantees to the Chechens regarding religious practices and, finally, the reconstruction of Chechnya. Several member States of the OIC were in fact already providing humanitarian aid for the Chechen civilian population.

45. Mr. SKOGMO (Norway) congratulated Mrs. Robinson on the exceptional clarity with which she had described the nature and the scale of human rights violations in Chechnya. As in many conflicts, crimes and atrocities had been committed by both sides. Although there was no sympathy for terrorists, it had to be recognized that the Government of the Russian Federation was giving the impression of not having taken the necessary steps to deal with those violations. The Norwegian delegation therefore approved the proposal that the Russian Government should set up an independent national commission of inquiry in Chechnya; the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights should offer all necessary assistance in that regard. Norway hoped that the Russian Government, which had shown open-mindedness on the subject, would invite the different mechanisms of the Commission - and in particular special representatives and special rapporteurs - to go to Chechnya to assist with the inquiry. Norway also hoped that Russia would take advantage of the assistance offered by the Council of Europe, the International Committee of the Red Cross and the OSCE.

46. Mr. BAUMANIS (Latvia) said that Mrs. Robinson's report had confirmed information received from other sources regarding the scale of human rights violations in Chechnya. Latvia certainly did not question the responsibility of the Russian Federation to preserve its territorial integrity and to prevent the spread of terrorism. Even so, it could not accept attacks by the Russian armed forces on the civilian population. The statement by Mr. Kalamanov had offered

little in the way of precise information on the measures taken by the Russian Government in response to the scale of the abuses committed in Chechnya. The truth was that the displaced persons could no longer even return to their country, which was in ruins.

47. The Commission on Human Rights should obtain from the Government of the Russian Federation an assurance that its armed forces would henceforth comply with the provisions of international law vis-à-vis the Chechen civilian population and that violators would be brought to justice. In addition, the Russian Federation should apply the OSCE code of conduct concerning the political and military aspects of security. Finally, the Russian Government should establish a national commission of inquiry and invite the mechanisms of the Commission on Human Rights to establish a presence in Chechnya. With the aims of transparency and complementarity in view, an agreement should be concluded between that commission of inquiry and the human rights mechanisms of the Commission. In particular, the latter could act as intermediaries between complainants and the commission of inquiry.

48. Ms. KUNADI (India) said that her country had consistently condemned international terrorism, denounced the links between terrorism and organized crime (including drug trafficking) and repeatedly highlighted the need for effective international cooperation to eradicate that global menace. The international community was accumulating more and more information on the origins of those terrorists, their sources of financial and other support and the camps in which they were trained. India regarded the events which had occurred in the North Caucasus region of the Russian Federation as a manifestation of international terrorism. It was the responsibility of the Government of the Russian Federation to determine the measures to be taken to protect the constitutional order and the territorial integrity of the country. The Indian delegation, like the High Commissioner for Human Rights, recognized that the primary responsibility for taking measures to deal with allegations of violations of human rights in Chechnya rested with the Russian authorities. In that connection it noted that the Russian Federation had never concealed the truth on that subject and was not restricting access to the regions. Since the Russian Federation had expressed its intention to remain open to dialogue on the subject, the Indian delegation hoped that the Commission on Human Rights would encourage that positive trend and refrain from any steps of a nature to complicate still further an already complex situation.

49. Mr. LI Baodong (China) said that his Government appreciated the open and transparent attitude adopted by the Government of the Russian Federation on the subject of the Chechnya issue. The invitation extended by the Government of the Russian Federation to Mrs. Robinson to visit the region and subsequently to report the findings of her mission to the Commission on Human Rights had been a positive gesture. China had always been opposed to terrorism of any kind, religious extremism and ethnic separatism and understood and supported the efforts of the Russian Government to safeguard the national unity of the country, its territorial integrity and its social stability. It therefore supported the measures which that Government had had to take in Chechnya to achieve those objectives. In conclusion, the Chinese Government considered that the Chechnya issue formed part of the internal affairs of the Russian Federation and that the latter was capable of settling the problems arising in that area in an appropriate fashion.

50. Mr. NORDMAN (Observer for Switzerland) said that his country had noted with satisfaction that a constructive dialogue was developing between the Russian authorities and the

High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mrs. Robinson. In that connection the statement by Mr. Kalamanov was encouraging. Likewise, the opening of an Office of the Special Representative of the President for Human Rights and Freedoms in Chechnya was evidence of goodwill. Switzerland was also glad that Russia had accepted visits to the North Caucasus by a certain number of representatives of international organizations and had authorized the ICRC to enter places of detention without being accompanied by witnesses.

51. However, Switzerland was alarmed by the seriousness of the violations of human rights and international humanitarian law said to have been committed by the Russian forces and by the alleged exactions committed by Chechen fighters. As depository of the Geneva Conventions and the additional protocols thereto, Switzerland appealed to the parties in the conflict to respect the relevant rules of international humanitarian law applicable to non-international armed conflicts. In particular, those rules prohibited disproportionate recourse to military force and attacks of any kind against the civilian population. Switzerland also emphasized that the torture of detainees was not acceptable in any circumstances.

52. Switzerland encouraged the Russian Federation to set up an independent national commission of inquiry to ascertain the whole truth concerning those allegations and to bring to trial and punish persons who had committed abuses. The commission should include international experts, since the international element would be an important factor for the evaluation of the efforts to be made. In particular, the commission of inquiry should establish the truth concerning the abuses committed in Alkhan Yurt, the Starosmyslovsky district of Grozny and Aldi. It would be difficult to obtain the trust of inhabitants on account of the violence to which the Chechen population was being subjected. It was therefore essential that the commission of inquiry should take steps to ensure the safety of witnesses, victims and all other persons who might be in danger as a result of making statements.

53. Switzerland asked the Russian Federation to allow the requests of the Special Rapporteurs of the Commission on Human Rights and the representative of the Secretary-General on internally displaced persons to enter the North Caucasus. Those different mechanisms had complementary approaches, and the best way of putting their competence to good use would be to ensure coordination among them and among the various competent bodies of the Council of Europe, the United Nations and the OSCE.

54. Mr. FARREL (Observer for New Zealand) said that his country recognized the legitimacy of the Russian Federation's concern about terrorist activities within its territory. In fact, New Zealanders working in the region had been victims of such activities. However, New Zealand considered that the Russian Federation's reaction had been disproportionate. In that connection the impact on the civilian Chechen population of the operations undertaken by the Russian armed forces was giving rise to serious concern. The New Zealand delegation urged the Russian Federation to comply with its international obligations towards all persons affected by the conflict, it also asked it to set up an independent and credible commission of inquiry. It was true that abuses had also been committed by the Chechen fighters, even so, primary responsibility for addressing violations of human rights in the region rested with the Russian authorities.

55. The situation of internally displaced persons was still a matter for considerable concern. The Government of the Russian Federation should authorize the international relief agencies to administer humanitarian assistance to the population. In that connection, New Zealand urged all parties to ensure the safety of the personnel of those organizations. The delegation also appealed to the Government of the Russian Federation to ensure that all detainees were treated in accordance with the relevant international norms. In that context the recent authorization granting the International Committee of the Red Cross access to detainees in Chechnya was to be welcomed. Finally, in view of the important role which the human rights mechanisms of the United Nations, and particularly the Special Rapporteurs, were called upon to play in the present situation, the New Zealand delegation urged the Russian Federation to respond positively to the requests for authorization to enter Russia sent to it by the latter.

56. Mr. WENAWESER (Observer for Liechtenstein) paid tribute to the High Commissioner for the quality of her report, her total commitment to the cause of human rights and the objectivity she had shown in the performance of her delicate task. Mrs. Robinson's report clearly demonstrated the scale and seriousness of the abuses committed in the North Caucasus region, and particularly in Chechnya, and justified the concern of the Commission as the principal body responsible for the defence of human rights. On two occasions in the past the Commission had taken action on the situation in Chechnya through statements delivered by previous chairpersons. The first armed conflict in Chechnya had led to the signing of an agreement between the two parties, but not to a genuine peace, with the result that the absence of political dialogue and of action in the field of reconstruction and economic development was inevitably to give rise to a resumption of hostilities. It was true that the international community unanimously condemned terrorism in all its forms; however, "terrorism" could not be used as a wholesale label to justify the indiscriminate and disproportionate use of force against an entire civilian population in flagrant violation of the international rules applicable to armed conflicts. The Chechen population was the principal victim of that conflict, and the humanitarian situation there was still disastrous.

57. Only a long-term political solution to the conflict which took into account its underlying causes could prevent a new outbreak of hostilities. The efforts made by the international organizations, and in particular the Council of Europe, the European Union and the OSCE, to find such a solution deserved support. The Commission on Human Rights, in its capacity as the international agency with the most experience in the human rights field, should affirm its leading role in that area by making a clear pronouncement on the situation in Chechnya.

58. Mr. MONTWEDI (Observer for South Africa) was gravely concerned by the continuing violence in Chechnya, and in particular by the reports (including the report of the High Commissioner) denouncing the indiscriminate and disproportionate use of military force against civilians. South Africa called on the two parties to respect their obligations towards the civilian population and to seek a political solution which would bring the bloodshed to an end. It was obvious that the parties to the conflict had not exhausted all possibilities for a peaceful resolution to the conflict and had not made serious attempts to spare civilians. There should be a rigorous and independent investigation of the atrocities committed by the two sides, and those responsible should be pursued and brought to justice. South Africa also associated itself with the calls for the involvement of the thematic mechanisms of the Commission in Chechnya, and in particular the Special Rapporteurs or representatives concerned with internally displaced persons or

reporting on violations of human rights such as extrajudicial or arbitrary executions, torture, violence against women and arbitrary detention. Those persons should be invited to go to Chechnya. Finally, South Africa welcomed the authorization given by the Government of the Russian Federation allowing the ICRC to enter detention centres in order to provide assistance there in accordance with its customary procedures.

59. Mr. NAVIKAS (Observer for Lithuania) stated that since the beginning of the military operations of the Russian Federation in Chechnya, Lithuania had shared the concern of the international community concerning the disproportionate use of armed force in that part of Russia. It associated itself with the statements of the European Union on Chechnya and supported the efforts of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and other international organizations to provide humanitarian assistance to displaced persons. Lithuania also supported the statement on that agenda item just made by Portugal on behalf of the European Union.

60. In the OSCE Summit declaration made in Istanbul, Russia had undertaken to seek a political settlement of the Chechen question. In fact, no other type of solution would be able to guarantee lasting peace and stability in the North Caucasus. In conclusion, Lithuania expressed the hope that the Russian Federation would continue to cooperate with the international organizations and that it would, as recommended by the High Commissioner for Human Rights, establish a broadly based and independent national commission of inquiry to establish the truth concerning the grave allegations of human rights violations in the region.

61. Mr. YUSHKEVITCH (Observer for Belarus) observed that terrorism was one of the gravest threats to international security. It was continually spreading further; it sought to destroy human rights and fundamental freedoms, and the international community had been called on, in the declaration on the subject, to combine their efforts in combating it. The situation in Chechnya should be evaluated in the light of those considerations. The situation there was extremely complex, and nobody had succeeded in combating organized crime and drug trafficking without causing victims. It was to be regretted that the international community was adopting a double standard in its approach to the Chechen question. That was not the way to contribute to the fight against terrorism.

62. Mr. KOROTAEV (International League for Human Rights) said that, although it was important to establish an international commission to conduct credible investigations into allegations of war crimes committed in Chechnya, it was equally necessary to establish a national commission of inquiry, since no international commission had ever been authorized to work effectively in Russian territory. But that national commission of inquiry should include Russians of eminence and credibility and independent Russian jurists. It should also include representatives of the Memorial Human Rights Centre and the Soldiers' Mothers Committee. It should be completely independent of the bodies appointed by the State or by the Russian Army to handle human rights questions. To be able to act without fear of reprisals it would have to be supported and assisted at all times by human rights militants from throughout the world and by the international human rights bodies. One of the priority tasks of the national commission would be the investigation of allegations of disproportionate and indiscriminate use of force by the Russian Federal Army, the operations of which had been incomparably more bloody than those undertaken by the Chechens; those operations were all the more serious as Russia, as a

signatory State of a certain number of legally binding international instruments, was committed to respect for human rights. The national committee should entrust a different person with the task of investigating complaints concerning the Chechen rebel forces or foreign mercenaries.

63. The International League for Human Rights therefore urged the Commission on Human Rights to adopt a resolution calling on the Russian Federation to cooperate with the Commission's special procedures by inviting the special rapporteurs and representatives to visit Russia and to have unrestricted access to all persons and facilities; urging the international community to facilitate and assist the work of the national commission of inquiry; and spelling out the details of cooperati among all the international organizations involved in human rights investigations in the North Caucasus.

64. Mr. TERASAWA (International Peace Bureau - FIDH) said that the indifference of the international community during the cry for peace and freedom uttered by the mothers of Russian soldiers and Chechen women during the spring of 1995 had enabled Russia to launch with impunity the most brutal campaign ever undertaken against a civilian population in the Caucasus. The Chechen people, abandoned to their fate, stood alone in the struggle against aggression by Russia, which was still enjoying the financial and political support of the West. At the time of the break-up of the USSR the Chechen people had endeavoured by all legal means to exercise their right to self-determination and secession guaranteed by the Constitution and had always insisted on the use of political dialogue for the settlement of the dispute. The war crimes and flagrant violations of human rights committed against the Chechen nation constituted an act of genocide, for which the highest political authorities in Russia must be held responsible. President Putin had recently described the war in Chechnya as a fight against extremism - including religious extremism - which in his view threatened the whole of the Eurasian continent; he gave the impression that he was conducting a new crusade - a notion which the international community could not but reject. The Commission on Human Rights should no longer be deceived by misleading rhetoric; it should use every available mechanism to restore the fundamental freedoms and all the human rights of the Chechens as individuals and as a nation.

65. Mr. AHMAD (World Muslim Congress) said that the violations of human rights committed in Chechnya by the Russian army with the knowledge of the authorities were beyond question and amounted to war crimes and crimes against humanity. Russia was conducting a war against the entire Chechen people on the pretext of punishing the "bandits" and "terrorists" which it accused of having carried out bomb attacks in Moscow and attacking Daghestan, although there were serious doubts concerning the origins of those atrocities. The present problem was one of determining whether Russia under its present government was going to continue to conduct its relationships with Chechnya on a colonialist basis (as the rise of nationalist sentiment in Russia seemed to imply), and whether it was going to continue to maintain its control over that Republic with the brutality resorted to in the nineteenth century by the Tsarist regime, and then in the twentieth century by the Soviet leaders. An agreement had been concluded in 1996, after the first war in Chechnya, which left the latter in control of its own affairs and shelved the question of independence until a peaceful settlement had been reached. The World Muslim Congress urged Russia to respect that agreement.

66. Mr. BAUDOIN (International Federation of Human Rights Leagues - FIDH), speaking also on behalf of the Memorial Human Rights Centre, referred to the conclusion of the report of the international mission of inquiry carried out in February 2000 by FIDH and Memorial. In the view of those two organizations primary responsibility for the crimes perpetrated in Chechnya by the Russian forces rested with Mr. Yeltsin and Mr. Putin, if only on account of their respective offices. The most serious violations of human rights committed in Chechnya, which were directed principally against the civilian population, were well established and, in view of their massive, generalized and systematic character, constituted war crimes and crimes against humanity.

67. The silence of the international community, and the expressions of support cynically conveyed to Mr. Putin on the occasion of his election, had sanctioned the policy of the Russian authorities and confirmed the impunity of the perpetrators of the crimes committed. The FIDH and Memorial demanded that the Russian authorities immediately put an end to the bombardments and torture, guarantee the availability of medical treatment to the civilian population and allow freedom of access to the independent media and the NGOs; at the same time, they called upon the Chechen authorities to protect the civilian population in all circumstances. They also called on the Commission on Human Rights to adopt a firm resolution on the human rights situation in Chechnya, at the same time setting up an international commission of inquiry and requesting the special rapporteurs on torture, summary executions and violence towards women to visit the region. Finally, they called for the establishment of an international penal tribunal on Chechnya to ensure that the perpetrators of the crimes against humanity committed in that country would not remain unpunished.

68. Ms. TERLINGER (Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch) reminded the Commission that the High Commissioner for Human Rights had called on it to take credible measures in response to the large-scale violations of human rights committed by the Russian forces in Chechnya. She said that the two NGOs on behalf of which she was speaking were firmly convinced that the establishment of a national commission of inquiry would not be sufficient for establishment of the truth and the prosecution of the perpetrators of the war crimes and other violations committed. In the first place, the measures so far taken by the Russian authorities, and in particular by the new special representative responsible for protecting human rights and freedoms in Chechnya to investigate credible allegations of human rights violations, did not constitute serious attempts to remedy the grave human rights situation existing in Chechnya; secondly, by refusing to allow the High Commissioner to visit the places of detention in which torture and ill-treatment were alleged to have been committed, the Russian Government had shown that its proclamations of transparency had been mere rhetoric. Finally, during the first war in Chechnya the Russian authorities had amply demonstrated that they were lacking in will either to conduct effective investigations into human rights violations or to prosecute the perpetrators thereof.

69. Only an international commission of inquiry established by the United Nations would undertake the systematic, thorough, independent and transparent gathering of conclusive evidence. The establishment of such a Commission would also foster investigations and prosecutions at national level. The Commission on Human Rights could not escape its responsibility for reacting to the situation in a credible manner and on a scale commensurate with that of the violations committed.

70. Mr. AKHYAD IDIGOV (Transnational Radical Party) said that thanks to Mrs. Robinson's visit to the Chechen Republic, the world now had a clear view of the scale of the violations of international law committed by the Russian Federation in that region of Europe. Chechens were being persecuted on account of their ethnic origin throughout the territory of the Russian Federation. In that connection the Russian Federation was continuing the bloody policy followed by the Soviet Union, first in Afghanistan and later in many other regions. Since 1991 the international community had remained silent in face of the chaos and anarchy reigning in that part of the world.

71. Mr. RAMISHIVILI (Russian Federation) interrupted the speaker on a point of order, remarking that he was not a member of the NGO he was supposed to be representing. He asked the Chairperson to see whether the speaker was duly accredited.

72. The CHAIRPERSON said that Mr. Idigov was accredited as a member of the Transnational Radical Party.

73. Mr. AKHYAD IDIGOV (Transnational Radical Party) said that the total war and the policy of ethnic cleansing directed against the Chechen people by Russia was equivalent to genocide. The international community must react. Respect for the right of the Chechen people to self-determination was a precondition for stability and peace in the Caucasus. That was the key question outstanding in the Chechen context. Since 1991 Chechnya had been demanding the right to create a State of its own, as other republics which became independent in the post-Soviet period had done. By claiming that right, which was still being refused them, the Chechen peoples were seeking to put an end to 400 years of insecurity, which had been marked by periodic deportations and a determination of the Russian Government to annihilate the Chechen people. It should be recalled that on 12 May 1997 the Russian Government had signed a peace treaty with the Chechen Republic, the terms of which it immediately proceeded to violate, isolating Chechnya from the rest of the world and creating the conditions which were to give rise to the current situation. The Russian authorities had done their utmost to cultivate fear among the peoples living within their borders in order to justify the war against the Chechen people. It was essential that negotiations should be under the strict control of the international community, acting as a guarantor of the agreements concluded. The negotiations should take place with the authorities legally elected in 1997 under the leadership of President Aslan Mashkadov.

74. Mr. PARRY (Indian Movement "Tupaj Amaru") said that, since the break-up of the Soviet Union, chauvinistic and retrograde nationalism had revived in Russia and was giving rise to ethnic and religious conflicts and even genocide.

75. The war in Chechnya formed part of a strategy being conducted by a corrupt and machiavellian class which held the reins of power in the Kremlin, controlled 50 per cent of the Russian economy and was transferring colossal sums to tax havens in complete immunity and with the benign non-interference of Western Governments.

76. The sole purpose of the war started by the Russian army in September 1999 on the pretext of combating "terrorists, criminals and bandits" was the ethnic cleansing of the Muslim population.

77. Seeing the indifference of the international community and the cynicism, the mutism and the complicity of the Western Powers, the Russian Government had decided to declare war on its own people, considering them as "terrorists". But the missiles and the bombs which had fallen on Grozny had struck without distinction at the innocent civilian population, both Christian and Muslim, as well as at the alleged "bandits".

78. At the dawn of the twenty-first century it was no longer possible to consider the destruction of Grozny, the tortures and the losses of thousands of human lives as "internal affairs" and to argue, in the name of non-interference in internal conflicts, that any State was free to violate the rights and freedoms of individuals and of the community to the extent that that violation did not constitute a threat to international peace and security.

79. The Russian Federation was a multinational and pluri-cultural State inhabited by over 140 nationalities, and the Chechen people, like other peoples engaged in struggle, were demanding their autonomy and their independence. The sole response of the Russian Government was to turn its heavy artillery on its own minorities. The speaker pointed out that the right of self-determination could not be monopolized and that it was not the exclusive property of the State. All States should recognize unreservedly that legitimate right and guarantee its unrestricted exercise in conformity with international instruments.

80. Mr. GORDON (Reporters without Borders International) observed that on the previous day the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, concerned by the human rights situation in Chechnya, had adopted an amendment designed to set in motion a procedure for the suspension of Russia. The Russian offensive had been paralleled by very serious attacks on press freedom. Chechnya was considered as one of the most dangerous regions for journalists in the world and had become a sealed-off zone of terror in which the war could be pursued without witnesses. Between 1994 and 1996 some 10 reporters had been killed; three Chechen cameramen had lost their lives in the bombardments launched by the federal army in 1999; and a score of journalists had been kidnapped since 1997. Brice Fleutiaux, a French photographer, had been kidnapped near Grozny and was reported to be currently detained in the southern part of the Republic; no news of him had been received since 19 January. It was also reported that Vladimir Gatsina, a photographer from the Russian Itar Tass agency, had been killed by his kidnappers on 20 February last.

81. The Russian authorities had no hesitation about silencing dissenting voices. On 16 January Andrei Babitsky, the correspondent in Russia of the American Radio Free Europe radio station, had been arrested by the federal authorities in Grozny, detained in a filtration camp and subsequently exchanged for Russian soldiers. He was currently under house arrest and facing two charges of "participation in an armed band" and "use of a false passport". He had not been able to go to Strasbourg, where he was to give evidence before the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. Vladimir Putin had stated that Andrei Babitsky was an enemy agent and that his activities were more dangerous than automatic weapon fire. From the very beginning the Russian officials had shown animosity towards foreign press representatives working in Chechnya, access to which was subject to an accreditation which was unobtainable. That left the field clear for the pursuit of a war without witnesses.

82. Mr. LITTMAN (Association of World Citizens) said that the Association of World Citizens had participated in the sessions of the Commission on Human Rights devoted to the former Yugoslavia, Rwanda, Kosovo, East Timor and now Chechnya with feelings of dismay and frustration. On each occasion there remained a sentiment of failure. There should have been speedier reactions; recognition that violence was not a solution to conflicts, and realization that a negotiated compromise was less costly than the destruction of people's lives.

83. It was lamentable to observe, barely one year after the one hundredth anniversary of the first International Peace Conference in The Hague, that a conflict was taking place in which the fundamental rules of war, namely the distinction between civilians and soldiers, were being totally disregarded. On both sides captured combatants were being treated in complete disregard for the minimum standards laid down by the Geneva Conventions.

84. In the view of the Association of World Citizens three elements should be taken into consideration in the future. The first element related to the codification of the "fundamental standards of humanity", which was to be discussed under agenda item 17. That codification deserved sustained attention. The common elements in human rights law and the laws of war should be clearly defined and put into practice.

85. The second element, developed in the statement published in document E/CN.4/2000/NGO/1, consisted of a proposal that the Commission should hear representatives of groups engaged in armed conflicts. During the period between the end of the first conflict in Chechnya, in January 1997, and the resumption of hostilities in Daghestan and Chechnya in 1999 a chaotic situation (kidnappings, murders, emigration of the Russian-speaking population, etc.) had prevailed. The international community should have reacted during that period. But the mechanisms which would have enabled the representatives of the Chechen administration and of the armed groups to express their viewpoints did not exist. Those mechanisms should be created.

86. Thirdly, the conflict in Chechnya had highlighted the need for greater articulation of efforts at conflict resolution between the United Nations system, regional intergovernmental organizations (such as the OSCE), Governments and NGOs. Admittedly, cooperation and coordination were difficult; but they had to be encouraged, since the consequences in the event of failure had been disastrous. To avoid failures all concerned had to work together creatively. The international community owed that debt to those who had died and suffered during the conflict in Chechnya.

87. Mr. MONOD (War Resisters International) said that Mrs. Mary Robinson had described with compassion the sufferings of Chechen women. He referred to the fate of young Russian recruits involuntarily trapped in the conflict, in which many of them had lost their lives. Some Russians had refused conscription for reasons of conscience and had been sentenced to terms of imprisonment, notwithstanding article 59 of the Russian Constitution, which recognized the right of conscientious objection and offered the possibility of performing civil service. That right was also recognized by the Commission on Human Rights in its resolution 1998/77.

88. The Singapore delegation had denounced the fact that War Resisters International was in favour of the abolition of armies. Considering the current situation in Chechnya one could legitimately wonder whether recourse to the army was useful and whether it was really necessary

to bomb an entire population to "pacify" the territory. It would be wiser to listen to the demands of the opposing sides. The Russian Army had not settled the conflict in Chechnya any more than NATO had settled the conflicts in Bosnia or Kosovo.

Statement made in exercise of the right of reply

89. Mr. RAMISHVILI (Russian Federation) recalled that a ruling of the European Court, in a case involving the United Kingdom and Ireland, had established that in an emergency it was for the State itself to determine whether the nation was threatened and to decide on the measures to be taken to remove that threat. It was therefore incumbent on the Russian armed forces to decide on the resources to be engaged in the light of the gravity of the situation in Chechnya. They had been criticized for disproportionate use of force, but that criticism reflected an insufficient knowledge of the situation. That being the case, the Russian Government had from the very beginning sought a political solution to the crisis, and discussions on the future of Chechnya were continuing uninterruptedly, particularly at local level. It was to be regretted that delegations were still clinging to the same position. The Russian Government would remain in dialogue with all the non-governmental organizations which were genuinely concerned with the human rights situation in Chechnya.

90. The CHAIRPERSON declared the discussion on agenda item 4 (question of Chechnya) closed.

RIGHTS OF THE CHILD (agenda item 13) (continued) (E/CN.4/2000/69, E/CN.4/2000/70, E/CN.4/2000/71, E/CN.4/2000/72, E/CN.4/2000/73 and Add.1-3, E/CN.4/2000/74, E/CN.4/2000/75, E/CN.4/2000/128, E/CN.4/2000/NGO/21, E/CN.4/2000/NGO/35, E/CN.4/2000/NGO/57, E/CN.4/200/NGO/59, E/CN.4/200/NGO/82, E/CN.4/2000/NGO/88, E/CN.4/2000/NGO/127, E/CN.4/2000/NGO/142, CRC/C/84, CRC/C/87, CRC/7/C/90)

91. Ms. VON HEIDENSTAM (Chairperson-Rapporteur of the Working Group on a draft optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights on the Child) had pleasure in informing the Commission that at its sixth meeting, held on 10-21 January 2000, the Working Group, of which she had been elected Chairperson-Rapporteur, had adopted the draft text of a protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, concerning involvement of children in armed conflict. The text was appended to the report of the working group published under reference E/CN.4/2000/74. Ms. Von Heidenstam had herself undertaken consultations on the subject in Geneva, New York and a number of countries directly concerned. Initially there had been fairly considerable divergences of opinion within the working group. However, efforts had been made to arrive at a compromise text. The basic idea enshrined in the draft protocol was that no person aged under 18 should be recruited in armed forces engaged in conflict. The speaker hoped that the text of the optional protocol would be adopted by the Commission and forwarded to the General Assembly, through the intermediary of the Economic and Social Council, for adoption.

92. Mr. KOBAYASHI (Japan) said that the Convention on the Rights of the Child had already been ratified or acceded to by no less than 191 countries and that a number of them had incorporated the provisions of the Convention in their national legislation. Unfortunately, many children throughout the world still found themselves in intolerable situations - the sale of children, sexual exploitation of children and the use of children as soldiers in particular - to which the international community must face up.

93. At the national level, Japan had endeavoured to strengthen the protection of children against sexual exploitation by adopting a law on the subject. In addition, Japan was actively participating in the preparation of a draft additional protocol to the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime which sought to prevent, repress and punish trafficking in women and children.

94. The international community had shown its determination to tackle those problems. The working groups set up to draw up two optional protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child had completed their work. In view of the importance of those two instruments, the Japanese delegation hoped that the General Assembly would adopt them at an early date. In that connection there were still several obstacles to be overcome, and in particular lack of understanding of the rights of children, a lack of political will, poverty and armed conflicts. The cooperation of the international community was essential to overcome those obstacles, and in particular to put an end to extreme poverty, which rendered the protection of the rights of the child extremely difficult.

95. The situation of children during and after armed conflicts deserved particular attention. In that connection Japan welcomed the role played by the United Nations in Sierra Leone and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Japan was making financial contributions to the programmes of the United Nations bodies engaged in the reconstruction of East Timor and Kosovo, in which particular attention was being given to children. Japan was also supporting the UNICEF plan for the reconstruction of schools, for it was education which gave children hope for the future.

96. To achieve the aims of the World Summit for Children, the tenth anniversary of which was being celebrated during the current year, it was necessary to strengthen even further cooperation between States and the competent international organizations such as UNICEF and WHO. Japan had decided to extend its grant aid to cover all programmes focused on child welfare.

98. Ms. PEREZ DUARTE (Mexico), referring to the draft optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child concerning the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, considered the text inadequate. In particular, there was no mention in the text of the principle that children participating in those illicit activities were invariably victims and consequently should never be considered criminally liable. In addition, the continual references made to national legislation ran counter to the principle of primacy of international standards over domestic law. That was a serious obstacle to the international cooperation which was essential for the effective combating of those abuses committed against children. The reference to the age of a child was also disquieting, as if the fact of having reached the age of "sexual consent" could safeguard the child from the risks implicit in certain practices. In contrast, the Mexican delegation fully approved the second draft protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child seeking to prohibit the participation of children in armed conflicts and hoped that the text would come into force as soon as possible.

The meeting rose at 6.05 p.m.